



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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West Nile Virus Surveillance Begins in North Dakota

BISMARCK, N.D. – On June 1, 2007, the North Dakota Department of Health – in conjunction with several local, state, federal and private agencies – began coordination of West Nile virus (WNV) surveillance activities to determine the prevalence of the disease across the state.

Statewide surveillance activities include reporting and testing sick horses, trapping and testing mosquitoes, monitoring illness in humans, and reporting and testing dead birds. Only certain bird species – such as crows, magpies, blue jays and ravens – will be tested again this year.

“Although not all birds will be accepted for testing, the Department of Health is still interested in reports of dead birds,” according to WNV surveillance coordinator, Michelle Feist. “People who find a dead bird that is not on the test list or is too decomposed for testing are asked to make a report via the online dead-bird reporting form found at www.ndwnv.com.”

People who have questions about dead bird testing and reporting can contact their local public health unit, Indian Health Service sanitarian, veterinarian, extension agent, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the USDA Wildlife Services or the North Dakota Department of Health.

A person cannot catch West Nile virus by touching a dead bird. However, anyone handling any dead bird or animal always should take precautions, such as wearing protective gloves and washing their hands.

In 2006, 137 West Nile virus cases in humans were reported to the Department of Health, with one death. In addition, West Nile infection was identified in 10 birds, four horses, four mosquito pools and 36 sentinel chickens.

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Tracy Miller, West Nile virus program manager, warns that some areas of the state have already noted an increase in the number of *Culex tarsalis* mosquitoes in local traps. “*Culex tarsalis* is the species identified as the primary vector for spreading West Nile virus in the state. Although it is unusual this time of the year to see increases in *Culex tarsalis* mosquitoes, there are measures people can take to protect against infection.”

The best protection against West Nile virus infection is to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes. People are encouraged to take the following protective measures:

- Use insect repellents containing ingredients registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – such as DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus or permethrin – and apply according to manufacture’s instructions.
- Wear protective clothing such as long-sleeved shirts and pants.
- Limit outdoor activities between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most likely to bite.
- Eliminate stagnant water in containers around homes where mosquitoes can lay their eggs (such as buckets, flowerpots, old tires, wading pools and birdbaths).
- Keep the grass around your home trimmed.

Most people infected with West Nile virus experience no symptoms or have only mild symptoms such as fever and headaches. More severe infection may result in high fever, severe headache, stiff neck, altered mental state and death. Although the elderly are more likely to have severe infections, anyone who develops severe symptoms should consult a physician.

For more information about West Nile virus, contact Michelle Feist, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378 or visit www.ndwnv.com.

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